

HABS No. CA-2648

Benjamin A. Breakey Residence
1660 Rockwood Street
Los Angeles
Los Angeles County
California

HABS
CAL
19-LOSAN,
74-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94107

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
BENJAMIN A. BREAKEY RESIDENCE

HABS No. CA-2648

Location: 1660 Rockwood Street
Los Angeles
Los Angeles County
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U.S.G.S. Hollywood 7.5' Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
11.38,334E. 376,992N

Present Owner: Good Shepherd Center for Homeless Women
Catholic Charities, Inc.
267 N. Belmont Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90026

Present Use: Vacant (to be demolished)

Significance: The residence is a rare example of its Victorian style in the neighborhood. Sited on a prominent corner location, it is one of the oldest (pre-1890) extant residences identified to date in the central city. Although the structure is in severe disrepair, the essential character-defining features and spaces are intact.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Construction: Tax Assessor records estimate the date of construction of this house as 1885. Based on a review of additional archival material including Sanborn Maps, city directories, and voter registration records, the construction date appears to be 1888. The residence does not appear on the 1888 Sanborn Map, but does appear on the 1890 Sanborn Map. Building records printed in the Los Angeles Times for 1887 confirm the house was not built in 1887, as there is no reference to this property in the Annual Trace Number, an edition of the newspaper which recorded construction data on a yearly basis. Benjamin A. Breakey, believed to be the original owner of the house, first registered to vote at this address on September 29, 1888.
2. Architect: Not known
3. Original and subsequent owners:
Benjamin A. and Marcia Breakey (1886 (unimproved land) - 1893)
Peter A. and Raisse S. Demens (circa 1894-1895)
Charles Titcomb and Charles Fox (1900)
Charles Fox (circa 1901-1907)
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not known
5. Original plans and construction: Not known
6. Alterations and additions: An addition of 8' by 15' was made in 1907 to the north side of the house by builder F.H. Gill for owner Charles J. Fox. In 1939 the kitchen was enlarged and a new toilet was added.

B. Historical Context

This property is comprised of Lots 16, 17, and 18 of the Subdivision of Lots 3 and 4 of the Highland Tract in Lot 6 of Block 39 Hancocks Survey which was subdivided in 1884. A portion of the parcel was purchased on June 8, 1886 by Benjamin A. Breakey and his wife Marcia for \$2,150 (which suggests the price of unimproved land). They purchased the westerly 95 feet of lots 16, 17, and 18; they did not purchase the easterly 45 feet of the three lots which comprises the remainder of the current parcel.

In city directories, Breakey was listed in 1886 as being in the business of hardware and agricultural implements at 21 and 23 N. Spring. Over the years the New York native was listed in voter registration records and city directories as a merchant, capitalist, and wholesaler and retailer of hardware at other locations, including 113 N. Main Street in Los Angeles.

The property was owned by the Breakey family from 1886 until 1893. Breakey occupied the house from 1888 until 1893 with family members, including Benjamin A. Breakey, Jr., a salesman and later a bookkeeper for his father's company. In 1893 the property was traded by Breakey's wife Marcia to Raisse S. Demens (wife of Peter A. Demens) for property located on Ionia Street (originally known as Cummings Avenue), located near Angelino Heights. Demens and his family occupied the house on Rockwood in 1894 and 1895. A native of Russia, Demens was president in 1894 of Empire Steam Laundry in Los Angeles with Fred E. Fay as vice president/secretary and John F. Blair treasurer. In 1895 Demens served as secretary for The Curapella Company which manufactured toilet and shaving soap with Fred E. Fay, president, and Swen Britz, chemist.

The house was vacant in 1897. Tax Assessor records indicate that the western portion of the parcel, on which this house sits, was owned by Charles C. Titcomb in 1900, while the eastern portion of the parcel was owned by Charles J. Fox. Fox, who worked in real estate, acquired the western portion of the parcel in 1901, including this house. There is no evidence in city directories or voter registration records that Titcomb occupied the house. The house was occupied by Harry E. Andrews, City Editor of the Times, from 1900 to 1902. In 1903 the house was occupied by Fox and his son Charles J. Fox, Jr., a bookkeeper for First National Bank of Los Angeles. Fox Sr. continued to occupy the main house until 1906 and built a rear house in 1904 at the address of 116 N. Union. In 1904 his son moved into the rear house where he lived until 1906. No subsequent owners of the property are known.

Vacant for several years, the residence was purchased by Catholic Charities, Inc. as part of the site of the Good Shepherd Center for Homeless Women in the fall of 1995.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This two and one half story Victorian structure is of wood frame construction on a raised foundation and partial basement. Irregular in plan, it has a steeply pitched multiple gable and hipped roof clad in composition shingles. A wrap-around porch located on the northwest (front) corner is partially enclosed. An additional open porch is located at the southwest corner, with a two story enclosed porch with shed roof located on the south (rear) elevation. The structure is raised from the sidewalk on a level pad fronted on the north and east by field stone retaining walls with a concrete

Cladding includes mitered shiplap siding on the first floor, and shingles above the second floor. Shingles are also used as decorative bands and at gable ends. The first floor foundation and wainscot is clad in horizontal paneled wood. Decorative elements include three bay window units, Palladian windows at gable ends, separation of the second floor line with a flared skirt clad in shingles, turned posts at second floor corner windows, rounded and double wood panelled entry doors capped by an extended round gable with inset scrollwork. Windows include large single pane glass with horizontal windows above and double hung sash units.

The interior has an entry vestibule leading to a center hall which accesses all first floor rooms. An open switchback stairway leads to the second floor with an intermediate landing at one of the bay windows on the east elevation. Wood panelled double pocket doors lead to the first floor main rooms, with an additional pocket door between the front (northeast) parlor and dining room. Fireplace hearths have been removed from both front parlors, and in an inglenook located underneath the open main stairway. The northeast front parlor and dining room both contain beamed ceilings, with the dining room also having a wood panelled wainscot. The main stairway and secondary stair located off the kitchen, have been removed.

2. Condition of fabric: The residence is vacant and in poor condition. Many of the window and door openings have been boarded up. The gable fascia trim board and the trim and guard rail at the wrap around porch at the northwest corner have dryrot. Most interior elements have been removed, including doors, fireplace surrounds, stairways, cabinets, fixtures, and hardware. Although the structure is in severe disrepair, the essential character-defining features and spaces are intact.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The residence is two and one half stories in height. The irregular plan is 48' from east to west and 56' from north to south. The first floor is approximately 1700 square feet, second floor approximately 1800 square feet, and attic approximately 1100 square feet. The total square footage is approximately 4600.
2. Foundation: The foundation is poured in place concrete with a stem wall 8" thick and 8" above finish grade. The footing follows the footprint of the house including three covered porches, and also below load bearing walls that continue from roof and second floor. Additional posts supporting floor girders sit on brick footings 8" x 8" and 6" above finish grade.

The partial basement is also poured in place concrete with retaining walls 14" wide. The deepest part of the basement is 4'0" below finish grade.

3. Walls: The exterior finish is exclusively redwood siding and shingles with simple trim at the windows and doors. The first floor is primarily 8" high horizontal V-groove siding, with a plinth line created with horizontal panels at the north side of the structure extending to 30" above the finish floor. This paneled siding continues around the wrap around porch at the northwest corner. The second floor shingles flare out at the second floor line. A curved pediment at the second floor line above the entry porch at the north side of the house is the most elaborate decorative element. The two attic gables are finished with shingles. Both extend approximately 20" beyond the wall below and flare out at the base of the gable.
4. Structural systems: The structure is ballooned framed with rough cut Douglas fir studs and floor joists. Wall studs are 2" x 6" and floor joists at the first floor are 2" x 8". Roof framing and second floor framing is covered, the exact dimensions not apparent.
5. Porches: The primary floor structure at the porches is identical to the interior floor framing. Flooring is 1" x 4" T&G redwood decking. The guardrail is approximately 2' 8" high. The large porch on the south side appears to originally have had a guardrail between the posts though none of the guardrail remains in place. The small screened porch on the south side has settled away from the house. Steps leading to this porch have been demolished. The ceiling finish at all three porches is 2 ½ wide T&G flush wood siding. The roof covering at porches is identical to the composition shingles at primary roofs.
6. Chimneys: One brick veneered chimney is located on the east side of the house. It is 4'3" wide and projects 4" beyond the wood siding. The chase contains vents for gas heaters in the northeast parlor and bedroom above.
7. Openings: The main entrance is on the north side of the house off Rockwood Street. This entrance is a double door. Each leaf is 2'8" wide with seven panels. A second set of doors created a weather barrier between the outside doors and the foyer. Door trim is very simple with minimal milling finish. Windows are typically double hung with single glass. Large picture windows are located in the northeast parlor and bay windows are at the stairway. Palladian windows are centered at each gable in the attic. Two dormers facing north and east have narrow arched windows.
8. Roof: Multiple gable and hipped roofs intersect along the primary cross axis of the irregular building plan. Two dormers are visible above the front facade, one located on the main hipped roof faces north, the second located on the gable roof of a projecting bay faces east. The roofing material is composition shingles. Both gables extend approximately 20" beyond the wall below. Most of the gutter system is missing.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: See sketch plans on pages 9-12.
2. Stairways: The main stairway and secondary stairway have been removed. It is believed that the main stairway had an oak railing, stiles and wainscot.
3. Flooring: Typical floor is 1" x 4" T&G fir flooring and is painted or stained dark. There is no evidence any finish is original.
4. Wall and ceiling finishes: All interior walls are finished with lath and plaster. Ceilings are approximately 10'0" high with radius ceiling corners and finished in plaster.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Most interior doors are missing. There are two pocket doors 6'0" wide from the foyer to the two front parlors. Both pocket doors have a similar panel design as the front door. One door has two 3'0" wide leafs, each sliding away from the center. The other door is a single leaf that slides into a pocket towards the north. The few remaining interior doors and other exterior doors are also panel doors of fir construction and painted to look like oak. Trim is simple with minimum mill work.
 - b. Windows: Large picture windows bring light into the northeast parlor and primary stairway. The light at the stairway also brings natural light into the foyer at the center of the house. The southwest bedroom on the second floor has two sets of corner double hung windows above the bay window in the dining room.
6. Decorative features and trim: No finished cabinets remain in the house. Fireplace surrounds at gas room heaters have been removed. Base trim is 8" high and simple with minimum milling. A picture rail 1 1/2" high runs throughout the first floor.
7. Hardware: No hardware remains in the house.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Small fireplace like gas heaters are the original heat source. A large gravity feed furnace is located in the basement.
 - b. Plumbing: A small appendage to the east side of the house appears to be the original bathroom. Other bathrooms on the second floor appear to be much later alterations.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The house is located at the corner of Rockwood and Union Streets. This is on a ridge tapering down towards the west from Union Street. The primary wrap around porch faces northwest looking beyond the ridge and out toward the Hollywood Hills. The north and west yard is bordered with a 3'0" random stone retaining wall capped with concrete, steps from Rockwood and Union Street sidewalks rise up to the raised yard.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography

From Pueblo to City, Le Berthon Publishing, Los Angeles, p. 45.

Gebhard, David and Robert Winter, Architecture in Los Angeles: A Compleat Guide, Peregrine Smith Books, Salt Lake City, 1985.

Home Telephone and Telegraph Company Directory, 1900.

Los Angeles City Directories, 1886-1919

Los Angeles Times, January 1, 1888, Annual Trace Number, p. 13.

Architects Files, Johnson Research Associates.

Government Records

Census of the United States, 1900.

City of Los Angeles Building Permits, 1905-1950.

Deed, June 8, 1886.

Los Angeles Voter Registration records, 1888-1906.

Tax Assessor Records, Book 35, 1900-1919.

Maps

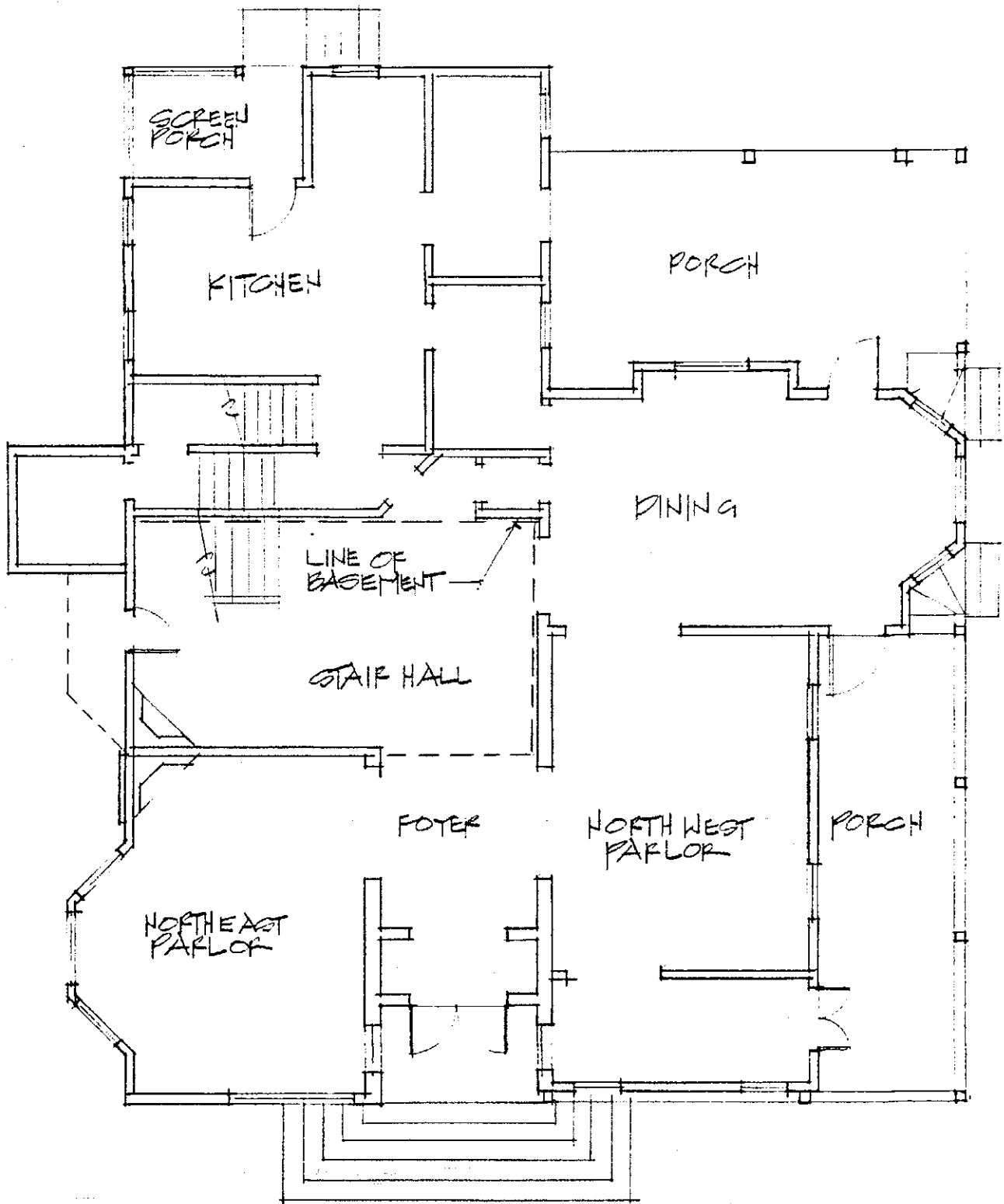
Tract Map for the Subdivision of Lots 3 and 4 Highland Tract Lot 6 Block 39 Hancocks Survey, 1884.
Sanborn Map, 1888.
Sanborn Map, Volume 2, Sheet 64, 1890.
Sanborn Map, Volume 3, Sheet 125, 1894.
Sanborn Map, Volume 3, Sheet 256, 1906.
Sanborn Map, Volume 3, Sheet 256, 1906 updated to 1934.
Sanborn Map, Volume 3, Sheet 256, 1906 updated to 1951.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project involves construction of three buildings and retention of a fourth. Two of the new structures will house homeless women; the third is to be used for job training and retail facilities. The existing residence on project site which will be retained will be rehabilitated for use as administrative offices and staff housing for the complex. The project will require the demolition of the Benjamin A. Breakey Residence and four other residential structures. The two new housing structures will be located on Rockwood on either side of the retained residence at 1650 Rockwood. The 32-unit transitional housing structure will be three stories in height and consist of 12,685 square feet. The 13-unit permanent housing structure will be two stories in height and consist of 12,225 square feet. Additional parking and approximately 19,000 square feet of retail/training and residence space will be constructed on the adjacent parcels which face Beverly Boulevard.

This HABS written report was prepared by Historic Resources Group in September 1995 for the City of Los Angeles Housing Department. It is based upon the Determination of Eligibility and Finding of Adverse Effect Report dated May 1994 which was submitted to the State Office of Historic Preservation. This document is the recordation required by a Memorandum of Agreement among the City of Los Angeles Community Development and Housing Departments and the California State Historic Preservation Officer with concurrence by Good Shepherd Center for Homeless Women and accepted by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The Historic Resources Group team was led by principals Christy Johnson McAvoy and William Delvac and included G. Peyton Hall, Director of Architecture, and Andrea Humberger, Project Manager. Sketch plans and architectural documentation were prepared by architect Carl Welty. Large format photography was provided by Tavo Olmos of Positive Image Photographic Services; 35 mm photography was provided by Timothy Brandt, AIA.

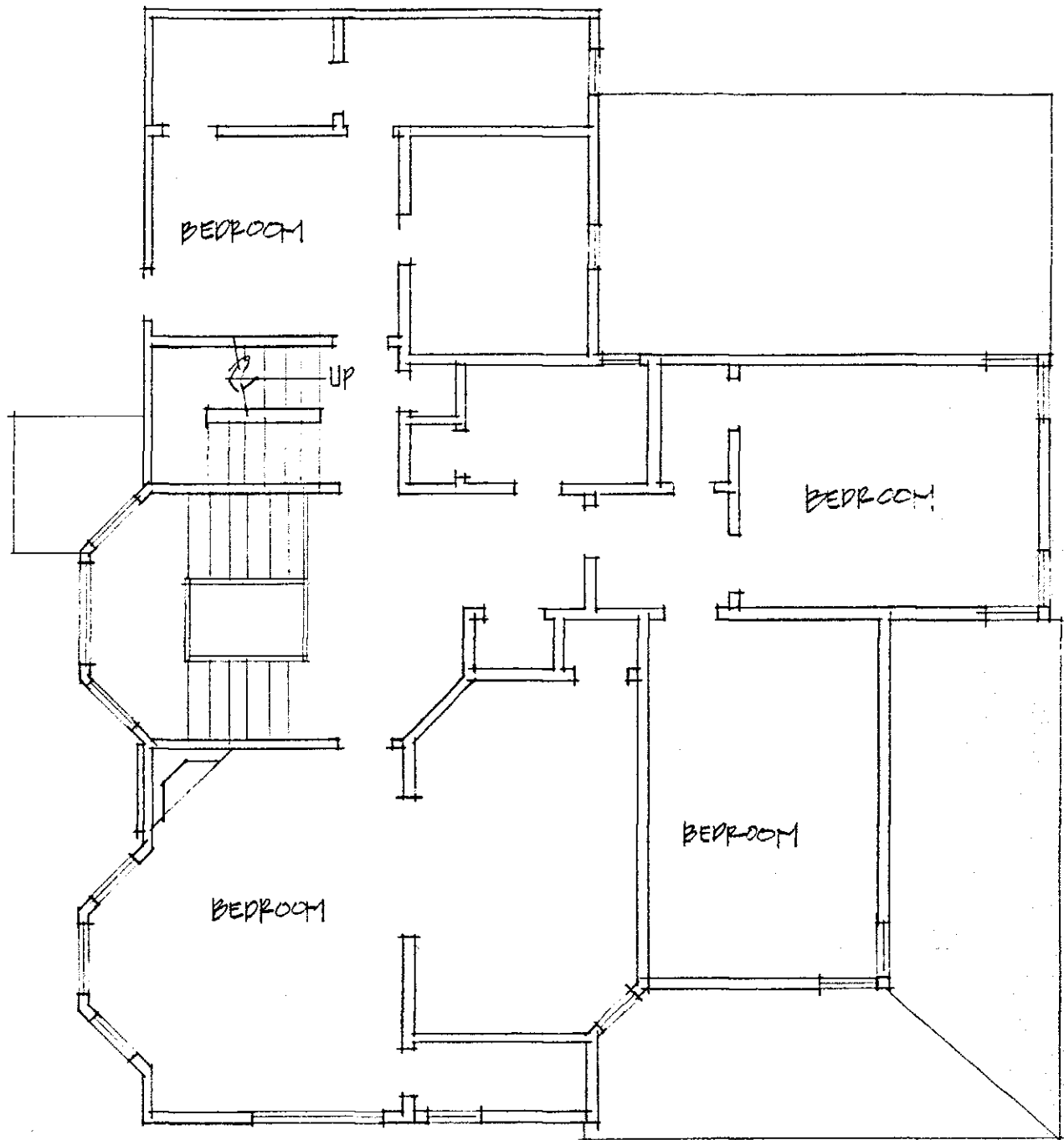
Sketch Plans:



1660 ROCKWOOD ST.
LOS ANGELES, CA.

FIRST FLOOR PLAN
1/8" = 1'-0"

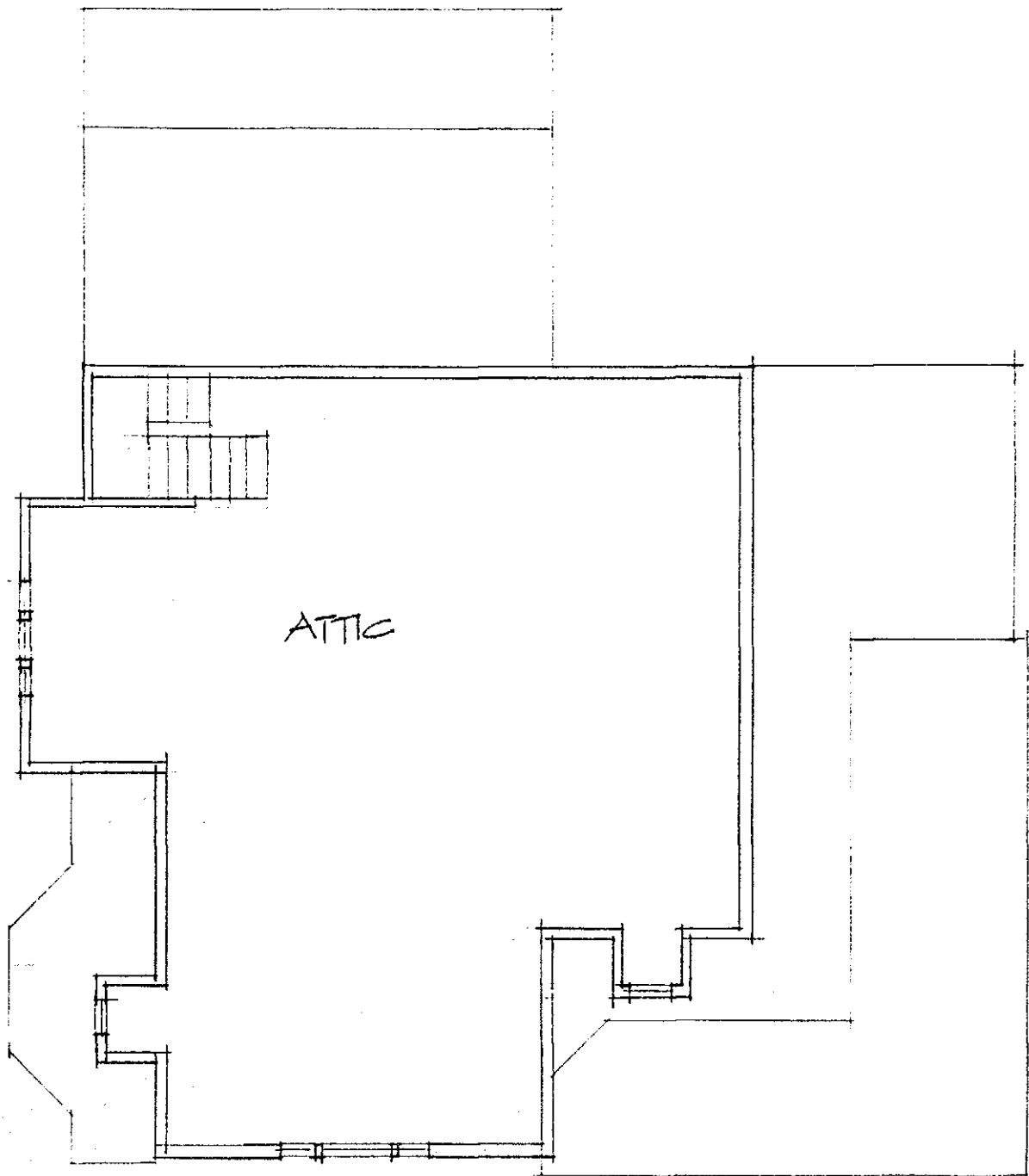
Sketch Plans:



1660 ROCKWOOD ST.
LOS ANGELES, CA.

SECOND FLOOR PLAN
1/8" = 1'-0"

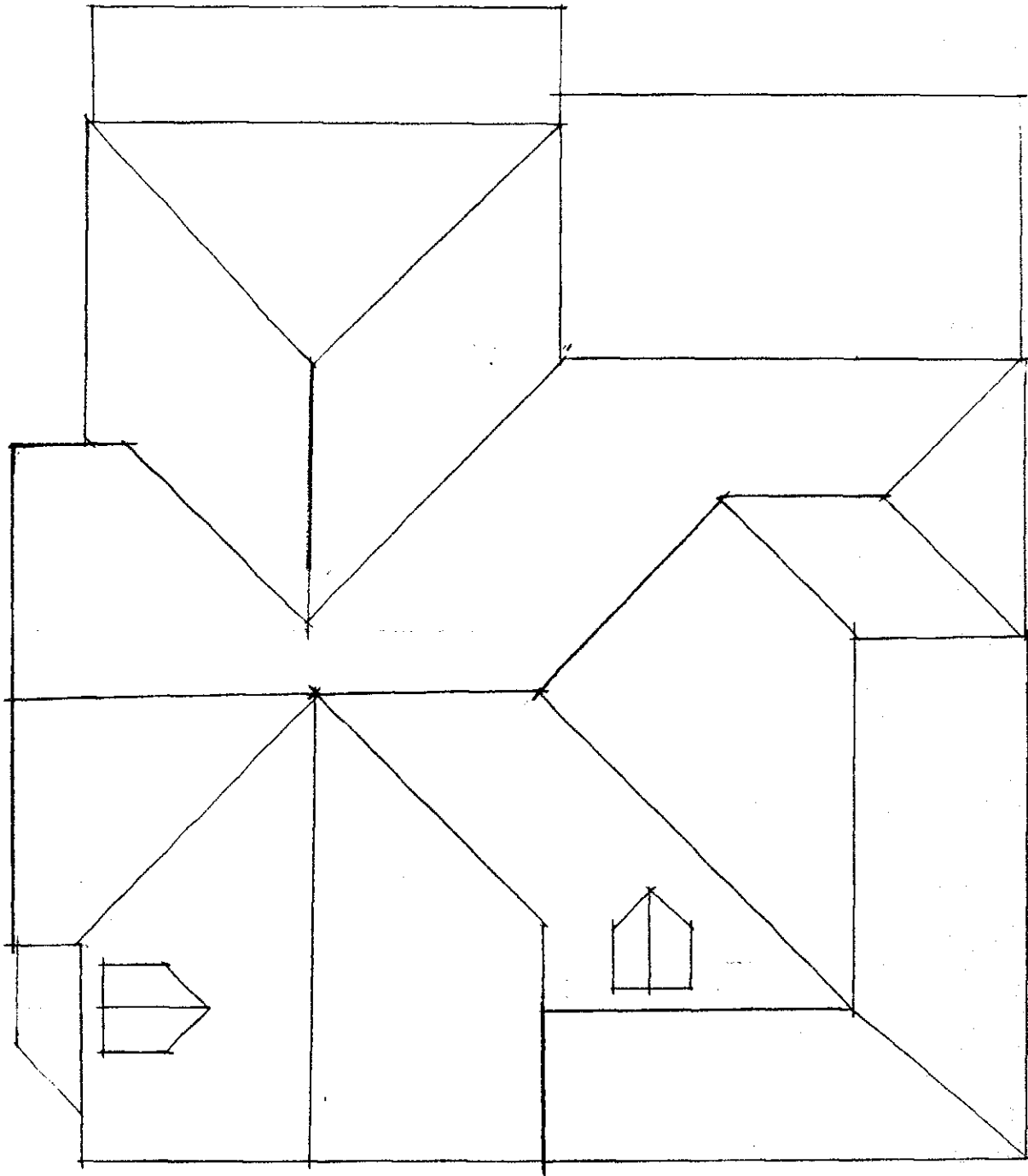
Sketch Plans:



1660 ROCKWOOD ST.
LOS ANGELES, CA.

ATTIC PLAN
1/8" = 1'-0"

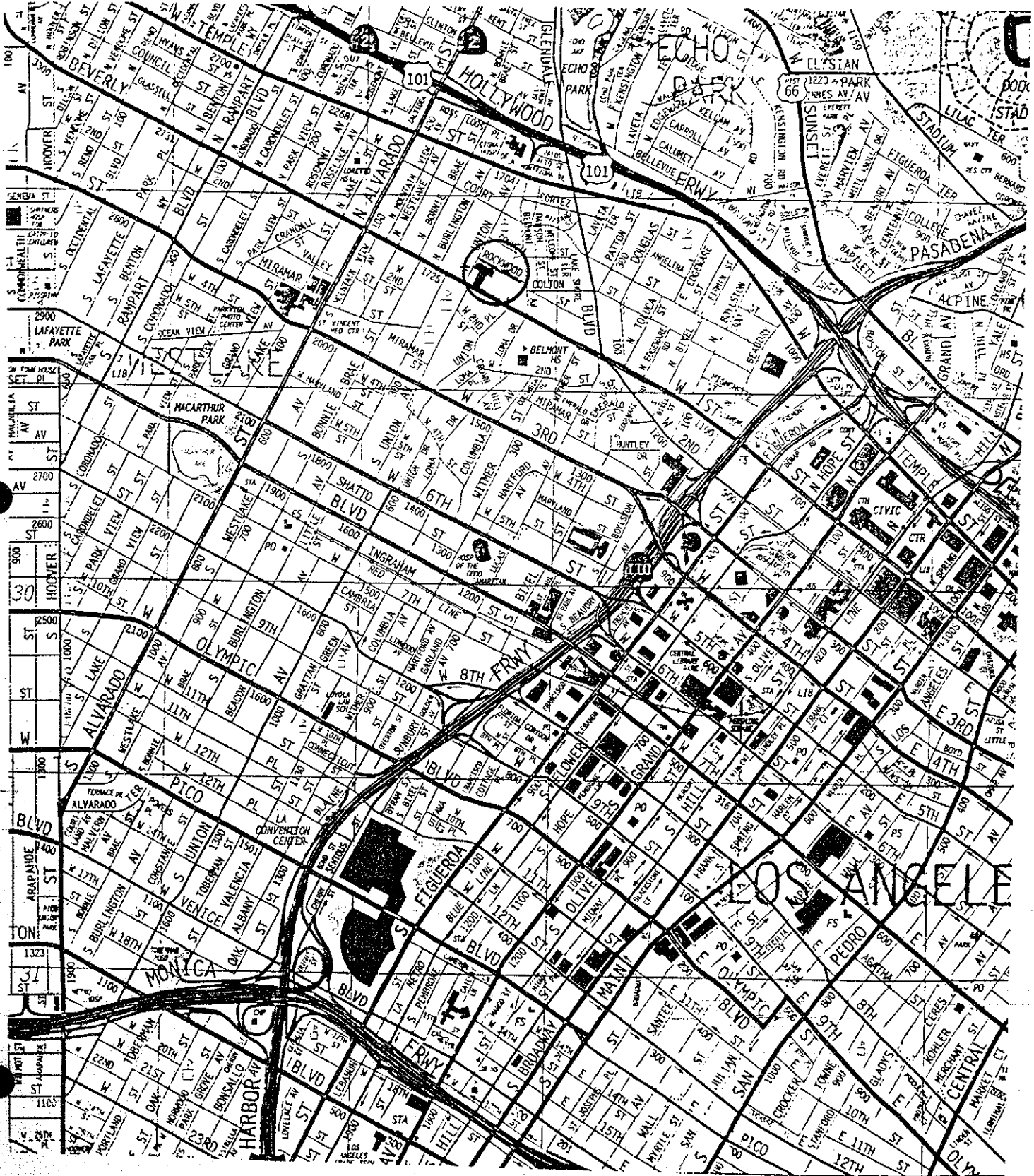
Sketch Plans:



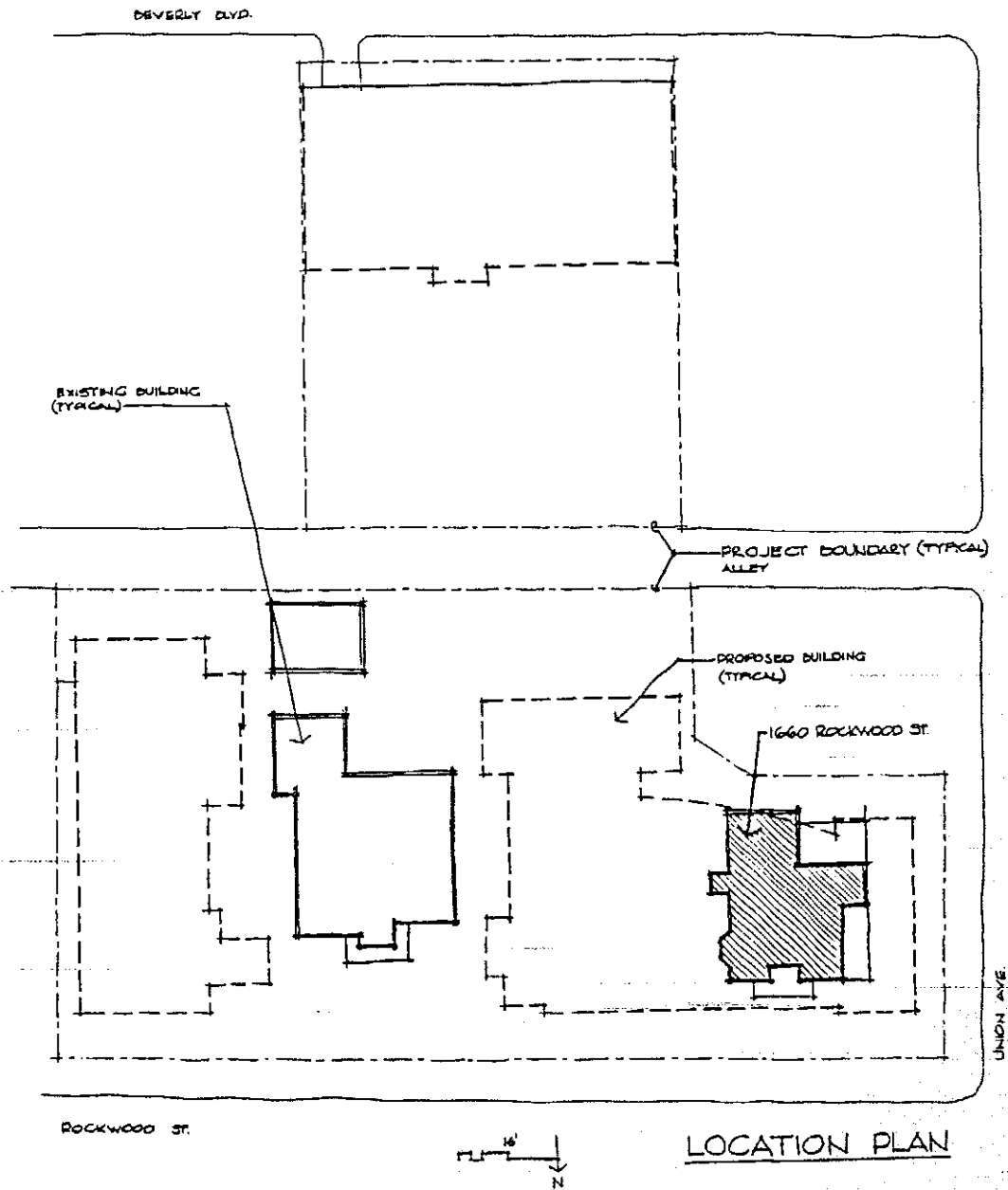
1660 ROCKWOOD ST.
LOS ANGELES, CA.

ROOF PLAN
 $1/8" = 1'-0"$

Location Map:



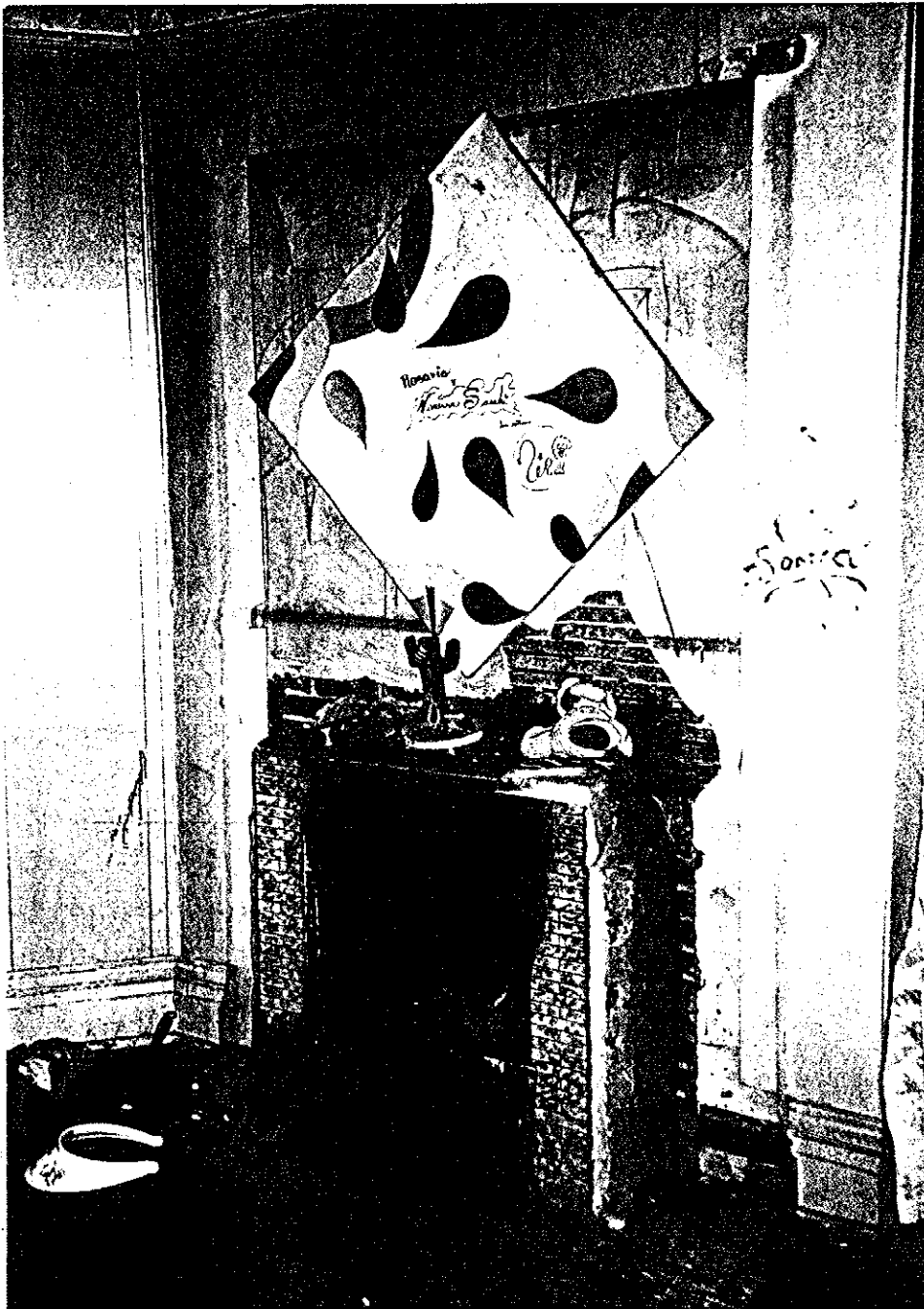
Site Plan:



LOCATION PLAN

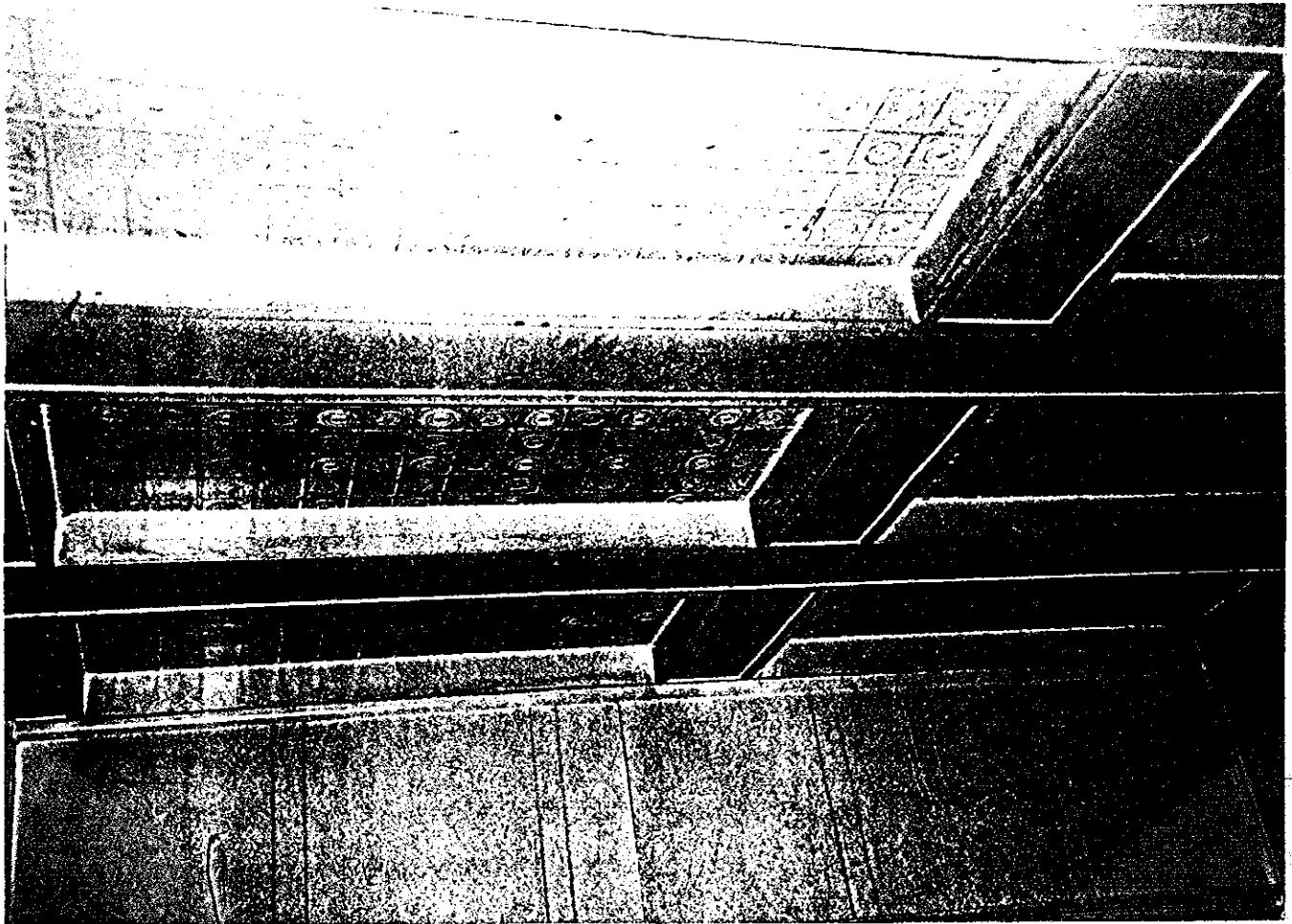
Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Fireplace in northeast parlor: view southeast.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Ceiling in northeast parlor; view southwest.



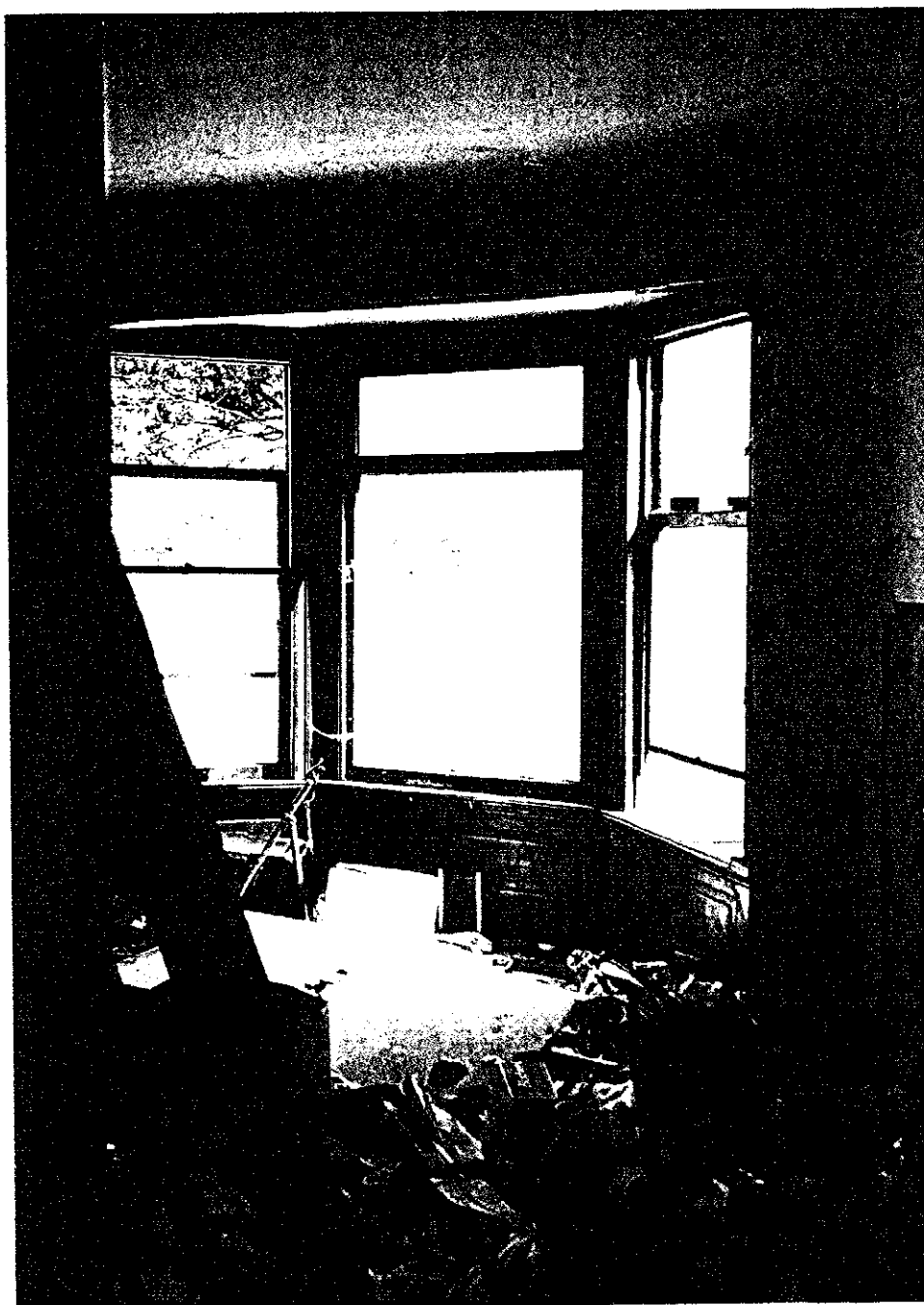
Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Door in northwest parlor; view southeast.



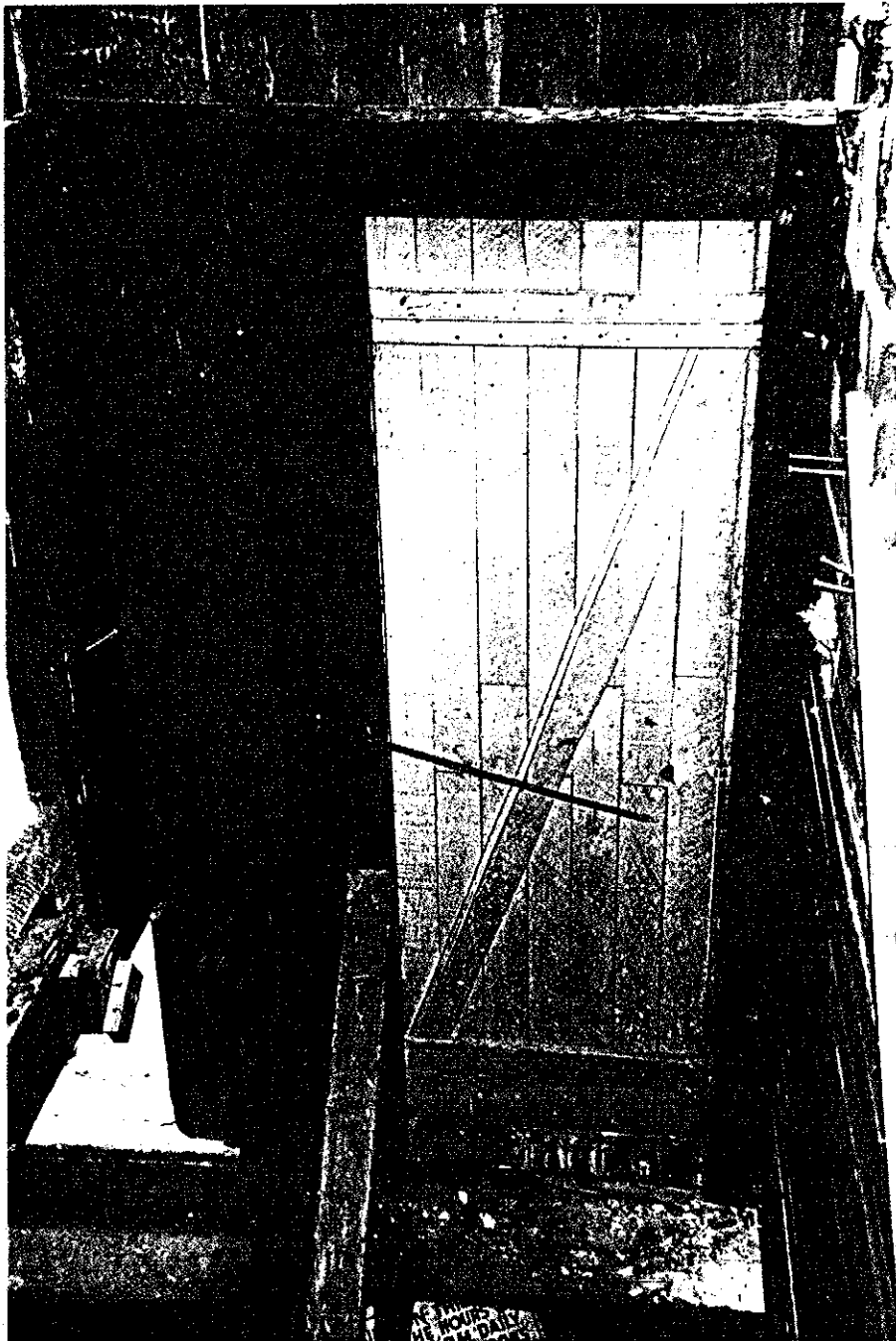
Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Bay window in northeast parlor; view southeast.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Basement door; view east.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Bay window at primary stairway; view east.



Photographs of Interior. 1994:

Foyer looking toward main entry doors; view north.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Bay window at dining room; view west.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Inset in dining room; view southwest.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Exterior door from dining room to northwest porch; view northwest.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

View to main stairway from dining room; view east.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Butler's pantry; view northwest.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Kitchen view toward door to screen porch; view southeast.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Secondary stairway; view east.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Kitchen cabinets; view southeast.



Photographs of Interior. 1994:

Foyer looking toward main entry door and door to northwest parlor; view north.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Stairway hall; view northeast.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Main entry doorway; view north.



Photographs of Interior, 1994:

Foyer; doors to northwest parlor; view west.

